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*Ernest McLaughlin*



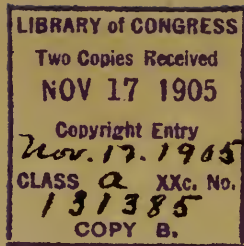
# Sonnets to a Wife

*By* Ernest McGaffey.



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Saint Louis  
William Marion Reedy  
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By ERNEST McGAFFEY

*For Cecile*

## *Foreword*

TRUE poetry needs not to be explained. It goes direct from poet's to reader's heart. The seventy sonnets in this little book have this quality of clearness and directness. They are easily understood of the people and yet they have a charm as well even for the literary gourmet. They are always simple. They are always sweet, and yet we cannot say that they are too much sugar'd.

Our poet surely does not "tear a passion to tatters" in his song, and while we may acknowledge that the sonnet form is one that forbids abandonment to fine frenzies, being in its nature repressive of exuberances, it must be clear to any reader of this sequence that its underlying note is that of a passion of exalted reserve. The love here expressed is of that reticently strong sort which characterizes the Anglo-Saxon. The passion is strong and deep: it is never spectacular: it is not fantastic, whimsical. This poet aims not to make an effect soely, to turn the raptures and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the wistfulness of his spirit into startling

copy. He writes as one fulfilled of reverence before the great boon and mystery of a woman's love. The impression he gives us is of the sanctity of a relationship in which, nevertheless, there is full recognition of the element other than spiritual which must go to the making of a perfect marriage. Here are blended the charm of Phyllis, Phryne and Penelope, the grosser passion, of which so much modern writing is obsessed, being, however, left in the obscurity to which modern reserve has relegated it as something taken for granted, beautiful in its essence, but soiled and spoiled by being made familiar to the many.

Mr. McGaffey makes his sonnets a continuous hymn of the beautiful in Nature, and of that beauty, with its subtle, pervading sense of pathetic impermanence, as interpreting and interpreted by the sane and sacred love between a man and a woman. The clean atmosphere of the open world is in every sonnet. All the airs of heaven blow pureness about these lovers. We have no trace of contemporary materialistic views of love, no insistence upon the fascination of a rampant, savage, physically clamorous muliebrity. The spiritual signifi-

cance of the great Nature, of which husband and wife and their love for one another are a part, is always strongly suggested and this without cant either of orthodoxy or of the dolorous minor poet always lamenting the inevitable, immitigable loss of himself to the world. There is no negation here. Every line repudiates "the spirit which denies." The joy of living, the pleasure of remembrance, the hope that faces the future, the confidence—not too confident, however—that "there is a budding morrow in midnight"—all these things are proclaimed with an exultancy that is unfailingly serene. Emotion and intellect are finely harmonized. There are in these sonnets no signs of mere playing with the former or undue pride in the exhibition of the latter as mere cleverness. The poet is sincere with himself, and yet the strain of happiness is so frankly insistent that he cannot truly be called, in the ordinary sense of the term, serious. He is deliciously undidactic.

A characteristic of this tribute to woman, under the form of a glorification of the one woman, which will not be lost to the fine senses of those who, while appre-

ciating the banality and absurdity of recent superlative manifestations of feminism, nevertheless realize the enormity of the crime which civilization has committed against "the sex" in regarding it as wholly secondary to the masculine element, is the fact that, throughout this work, the wife is always treated as the companion of the husband. Rather let us say, in the good, warm sense, this poet's wife is his "chum." She is a woman who sees and hears and feels the gladness of earth and air and sky. She is a woman of the open air. She knows the trees, the birds, the signs of the changing seasons. No Eighteenth Century shepherdess she, but a modern American woman, enjoying such freedom as only the American woman knows. She is the central figure in an eminently healthful picture of life, and it is this fullness of health which keeps the sonnets clear of all morbidity. True, we have hints, now and again, of the immanence of death—that shadow upon all the joy of the world which, somehow, seems nevertheless to give to joy its uttermost poignancy—but the fact is accepted. The poet nor whimpers nor whines. He faces his fate. He has his love, and all this world



which that love glorifies, and love is, in its highest form, both hope and faith.

As to the technique of these sonnets, it were idle to maintain that it is faultless. Mr. McGaffey almost prides himself upon his assertion of a large ignorance of grammar and rhetoric. It is, therefore, well to say that, considering such self-confessed limitation, and considering also, that the sonnet is "a difficult and cloying form of verse," and that the form is necessarily a rigid restriction upon thought and feeling, this performance is almost miraculously artistic. There are few literary allusions, because the substance of the work comes straight from the heart and from Nature, and not from books. It is felt, not echoed from other poets. Defective sonnets there are in this sequence, but the very defects, generally speaking, give the work a warmth, a color, a spontaneity which might have been utterly lost through too much concern with the abstrusities of syntax and prosody. It is easier to criticise these sonnets than to write sonnets that will compare with them. The poet is greater than the form to which he submits himself. His lyricism asserts itself

triumphantly always, and often in so doing it bursts the bonds of the form that is too compressed for it.

Here, then, are these "Sonnets to a Wife." They are sweet and clean and strong. They are the glorification of womanliness as, taken all in all, the finest thing in this, the only world we know. They honor goodness. They breathe tenderness and courage and a pantheistic piety. They are the happy mean between the ascetic and the sensual apprehension of life. They are the utterance of a sane passion for a good woman by a poet who is also a good man. They may not appeal to the taste that invariably prefers "Madam Bovary" to "The Vicar of Wakefield," but they will touch tenderly, and not the less surely, the hearts of all those who feel and know that true love is something more than a blind, bodily instinct or desire that we have in common with the beasts that perish.

*William Marion Reedy.*

*Sonnets to a Wife*



*Life at its Best*

Life at its best is but a troubled sea;  
    The ship is launched with snowy-spreading sail  
    To face the reefs, the billows and the gale,  
And meet the perils that are yet to be.  
The shore she left fades dimly in the lee  
    And on the beach the forms and faces fail;  
    Come what come may, or rain or sun or hail  
The ship glides on, the mariner is free.

But Ah! what joy when backward o'er the foam  
    From stress of storms and far, unfriendly lands,  
Held in the hollow of the sky's vast dome  
    To mark at last the well-remembered sands;  
To know once more the harbor of a home  
    And welcome of a woman's outstretched hands.

*The Wooing*

Not with the thoughts of others do I seek  
    To wake your interest and hold it fast;  
    Not with a fancy from the buried past  
Some honeyed fragment of the ancient Greek,  
Have I essayed in halting form to speak,  
    But I have all such cunning outward cast  
    And trusted to the Saxon words at last  
To light your eyes—put color in your cheek.

The simplest speech is truest; when I say  
    “I love you!” in those three words I have said  
All that I know, or compass, or can feel.  
Let those who will, adopt the tortuous way  
    The while their thought in speech obscure is led  
Round, round and round, a wheel within a wheel.

*In the Fields*

When on the hills the golden sunlight lies,  
And apple-trees are heavy with the snow  
Of drifted bloom that shades the grass below,  
While far above are realms of cloudless skies;  
When overhead the wandering swallow flies  
And butterflies in loops of color go;  
Then, as we wait together, do I know  
Some touch, some hint, some gleam of Paradise.

The sweet song-sparrow from the poplar sings  
The swaying leaves put forth their emerald shields,  
Each trembling blossom where the barred bee clings  
Its store of sweets through drowsy hours yields;  
What sense of life, what joy that almost stings,  
With you and I there loitering in the fields.

*Jealousy*

If to be jealous is to hope to gain  
    Your every longing—make all other men  
    As misty to your memory as when  
The shadows slip across a window-pane;  
If to be jealous is to wish to reign  
    Your one true lover, chide me once again;  
    Call me as jealous as Othello then  
And all your chiding will be given in vain.

For I am one who cannot hide my thought  
    And curb my tongue and make my cheek a liar;  
The tissues of my nature was not wrought  
    Of lifeless clay, devoid of Pagan fire,  
And long in storm and anguish have I sought  
    And now have found, at last, my Heart's Desire.



*Books*

Tomes from dull minds I oftentimes have read  
And disquisitions of the great and wise,  
And sought to learn the secrets of the skies  
On wintry nights with starry scripture spread;  
Through labyrinthian passage have I sped  
Of romance and of deeds of high emprise,  
But nothing found compared to your dear eyes  
Nor poems like to what your lips have said.

To read a woman in the higher sense  
Is quite beyond the power of men's wit;  
Who says he does is made of vain pretense,  
And never can by wisdom benefit.  
Her look is more than spoken eloquence—  
Her voice the sweetest lyric ever writ.

*Love Without Passion*

Love without passion is a flower without sun,  
    Reft of the wind's touch, banished from the rain  
    Wrought against nature—therefore wrought in vain  
However fine its tissue may be spun;  
Its petals fade and wither one by one  
    And in the dust and under dust are lain;  
    Love without passion is the dying strain  
From shattered lutes that all to minors run.

True love is as the rose; the roses glow  
    With life and color in the summer air.  
The winds of Autumn through the garden blow,  
    The leaves are scattered and the vines are bare,  
The snows depart, the grass springs up, and lo!  
    Again the ruddy rose is blooming there.

*On the Hills*

When in the valley where the river ran  
And sunlight rippled on its current fair,  
While shadowed vistas of Autumnal air  
Re-echoed with the dying notes of Pan:  
When twilight's herald came in night's dusk van,  
While sank the sun in western splendor there,  
What joy for you and me all this to share  
Mid wooded glades and chords Æolian.

And in the hush that followed as we saw  
The after-glow dye deep the waiting slopes,  
While brooding silence hushed the sombre rills,  
Then fell upon our hearts a happy awe  
And light and shade of mingled fears and hopes,  
Star-signalled on the ramparts of the hills.

*Worship*

Gods, idols, fetiches of wood and stone  
Of carven ivory and of beaten brass,  
They rise and fall, they flourish and they pass,  
Or stand disfigured in some desert lone;  
Creeds come and go and on the sands are strown  
And wither like the winter-shaken grass,  
And all such things are shadows on a glass  
To this one love which I for you have known.

For in my pagan heart I hold you dear  
More than a miser might his store of gold,  
Or ship-wrecked tar the rescuing sail unfurled.  
In my religion you are worship here  
Beyond all gods or temples manifold,  
The sole and only woman in the world.

*Recollections*

To conjure up old memories; to say,  
    "Do you remember that in such a June,  
    An orchard oriole sang us a tune  
Melodiously from out a branching spray  
Of leafy denseness; or on such a day  
    We saw the silver spectre of the moon  
    Long after dawn, and nearing unto noon,  
A merest wraith of sickle gaunt and grey?"

These are love's echoes, faintly heard and fine  
    But ever-present, never dim nor mute,  
    That you and I in comradeship do share;  
Sweet symphonies that breathe a sense divine  
    Like misty chords that linger by a lute,  
    Though all the silver strings are shattered there.

*Women*

Of such a woman it may well be said  
    She has a graceful carriage; or is fair;  
    And of another she has golden hair  
And praise the poise and beauty of her head;  
Some women may be witty and well read  
    And some may charm by throats and bosoms bare.  
    All are Eve's daughters, all her power share  
To conquer man and lead him by a thread.

But more than seeming grace or outward sign  
    Of loveliness that like a flower is seen,  
    Is what she keeps shrined sacred and apart;  
Some glow of soul like sparkle in the wine  
    Some shadowy look, like Autumn pool serene,  
    The reflex of the pureness of her heart.

*Ideals*

Not rhapsodies for what we cannot reach  
Nor longing for what lies beyond our power,  
But just to make life lovely as a flower  
By gift of tenderness in thought and speech;  
Thus rain and dew their loving lessons teach  
In lace-like gleam or sudden-dropping shower  
And so shall we, through every passing hour,  
Hold fast to higher visions, each for each.

Fidelity and courtesy; and touch  
Of hopefulness to meet the coming years,  
And strength to view the days that backward roll,—  
These will I give you, and in pledging such  
Cast off the shadows of all crowding fears,  
And act a man's part truly, heart and soul.

*In Idle Hours*

In idle hours to backward look and see  
    The tracery of wind across the grass,  
    To mark the clouds that float in snowy mass  
With myriad filmy pennants flowing free;  
To hear a robin in the maple tree,  
    And see the pool's reflection like a glass  
    Where light and shade alternate come and pass,  
With muffled mellow murmurings of the bee:

This is to drink of nature's brimming cup  
    In woodland nooks of slumberous solitude,  
Where summer holds a golden beaker up  
    And all the earth by beauty's self is wooed;  
Do you remember where the dead leaf fell,  
    The violet's blue, the empty acorn shell?



*Alone*

The hum of many voices rises near  
And from the road comes din of carriage-wheels;  
Beyond are sails that draw the outbound keels  
Which northward from the shimmering harbor steer;  
And there are myriads of strange faces here  
Smooth brows that happy childhood's hour reveals,  
And wrinkled cheeks where care has stamped his seals  
And wandering crowds by sea-wall and by pier.

And we beneath the cloudless summer sky  
See all this gathering pass us in a stream,  
Nor note the lights that on the water gleam  
Nor white-winged gulls that seaward dip and fly;  
We are alone—the rest is but a dream  
In shadow-land we linger, you and I.

*Music*

A wind-song in the rushes, or a sigh  
    From Autumn's chorus in the naked trees,  
    The white-stoled chanting of the stately seas  
Against a line of cliffs that tower high—  
A plover's rippling whistle in the sky  
    Or wailing of the flutes in minor keys:  
    I in my time have harked to all of these  
And reedy splash of waters lipping by.

But Oh! how harsh such chords must ever seem  
    Since in my heart I hear an echo come  
    More sweet and low than plaint of mourning-dove;  
The reflex of the note that is my dream,  
    That music which makes other music dumb  
    The voice of the one woman whom I love.

*A Woman's World*

The man she loves; and all he means to her  
Is what a woman's world is; in her way  
Of living and of loving day by day  
Sometimes her dreaming eyes will fill and blur  
And memories of him will come to stir  
Her heart-strings; as a blossom's self might sway  
When through the scented, flowery paths of May  
Drift down the echoes of the winds that were.

The little things are what she treasures most;  
Sweet, subtle courtesies of hand and speech,  
For these the lover's attitude still teach  
Better than costly gift or idle boast;  
As one who reckons, not without his host,  
Holding her near and dear, yet out of reach.

*By Moonlight*

In shadow-haunted hush of lonely place  
    With ripples lapping by the reedy shores,  
    And glint of stars along the watery floors  
I see again the profile of your face;  
The moonlight trailed across your wrist like lace  
    Then disappeared behind its cloudy doors,  
    While we sat idly, with the idle oars  
Twixt earth and sky, as balancing in space.

How strange and beautiful to us it seemed,  
    Held in the hollow of the night to float,  
    With muffled liquid whisperings round the boat  
While overhead the constellations dreamed;  
Some faint-heard rustle from the distant sands  
And silence brooding o'er our close-locked hands.

*Companionship*

The sense of comradeship which now we feel  
Grew slowly as an oak does, and as strong.  
For now to one another we belong  
In all that makes a man and woman leal;  
Our lives are linked as firm as welded steel  
And in our thoughts sweet harmonies do throng.  
Like half-remembered echoes of a song  
As days and nights above our pathway wheel,  
  
So do the perfume and the joy of days  
Live with us and the season's sway dispute.  
Spring, Summer, Autumn, they may go their ways  
And bring nor bud nor blossom an it suit;  
Yet what reck we, beside the wintry fire  
Sitting alone, I and my Heart's Desire?

*Apart*

Bleak, bitter hours, when separate we knew  
    Days when the sun sank glowing in the west,  
    And quietly the shadows onward pressed  
Until the twilight blotted out the blue.  
The first faint stars came slowly to the view  
    And home-bound birds flew silent to their nest,  
    While swift as light our thoughts in eager quest  
Pierced outward, yours to me and mine to you.

Now in the years when we together dream  
    Those days apart have lost their sombre look;  
    Mere dog-eared pages of Time's well-thumbed book  
And not to us belonging do they seem.  
    Thus fate at last hath offered full amends  
    And made those lovers who were once but friends.

*Apple Trees*

First to our sight their branches brown and bare  
    Stood naked in the days of early spring,  
    Where haply showed the brilliant azure wing  
Of some conceited jay-bird roaming there;  
And then came May, and all the waiting air  
    Was white with dainty blossoms quivering  
With hordes of bees that gathered there to cling,  
And all those honeyed sweets to claim and share.

But best of all was in the days of June,  
    When thick and full the canopy of leaves  
    Put back the sun with sheltering emerald eaves,  
And housed us from the fervent light of noon;  
How happily we told there in the shade  
Of dreams of one another, unafraid.

*Reserve*

Some men proclaim their love and let it go  
In pitiful wild words that all may see,  
How they have sighed, or bended low the knee.  
God's will be done; I was not fashioned so;  
I know what utter love, is and I know  
What this our life together holds for me,  
But keep it sacred, as not meant to be  
Flung gossip-ward, to the four winds that blow.

I marvel at those singers who aspire  
To lay their souls bare to the rabble throng;  
For you my lips have trembled into song  
And you shall judge if I lack aught of fire,  
If that my heart-beats have not rung like chimes  
Within the echoing transept of these rhymes.



*Vanity*

To be as charming in your husband's sight  
As erst you were when he your lover came,  
Go linger by the mirror's polished frame  
And put all weariness to utter flight;  
Come with a smile and let your eyes be bright,  
Be gay, be sad, but never be the same;  
And thus your lover you may always claim  
Else lost mayhap by holding him too light.

An this be vanity—to add a rose  
To glow upon your bosom, train your hair  
So in his eyes you may be passing fair—  
Why, let it stand; a woman better knows  
That careless hands and sloven taste in dress  
May mar the spell of her own loveliness.

*In the Woods*

Deep in the glimmering depths of woods to wait  
    Where countless leaves with every breeze unfold,  
    To watch the sunshine weave its thread of gold  
Where tree trunks stand in tall alignment straight;  
To hear the flicker challenging his mate  
    With chattering note, far-piercing clear and bold,  
    And mark how dimly in the forest old  
The lights and shadows softly palpitate;

And there, shut closely from the outer world  
    To lie on some green slope and idly dream,  
Touch hands, and smile, while over us unfurled  
    The leafy banners of the noontide gleam—  
That was to find the Ponce de Leon spring  
Of youth, and hope, and blossoms burgeoning.

*Gold*

There is a gold unlocked by miser's key  
And gold is found in lees of sparkling wine,  
And there is gold along the swaying vine  
Where yellow half-blown roses drooping be;  
Gold and to spare among the sands at sea  
And palest gold in saffron stars that shine;  
And gold deep-digged from many a hidden mine  
And golden leaves upon the willow tree.

But all this aureate glitter is for naught  
When I in dreamful mood my love behold,  
Crowned with her tangled locks of tawny gold  
Like corn-silk in the breeze's meshes caught.  
None other gold may match it, none so fair  
As that which gathers in a woman's hair.

*To My Wife*

I as an actor, have played well my part,  
Not showing how the sons of men I scorn;  
Those shriveled, greedy souls who crave the corn  
The oil and wine, the treasures of the mart;  
Deep in my soul I burn the flame for Art  
As one who was a lyric poet born,  
As one who leads a singer's hope forlorn  
Yet with unshrinking and unconquered heart.

I can exist on what a Spartan can;  
Endure as granite; smile when friends do fail;  
Face Poverty, and see the years grow stale  
Or bide my time with any sort of man.  
Full in the teeth of Fate I fling the glove—  
Come age, come death, while I have you my love!

*A Woman's Love*

If I have fought my baser self and raised  
My thoughts to high ideals, it is due  
To this the love that I have found in you  
As I in your dear eyes have longing gazed.  
When I look back I find myself amazed  
At what I was; what mire I floundered through,  
So far I wandered from the pure and true  
While all my good intentions fitful blazed.

A man is half a savage, and he needs  
The woman's presence to arouse his soul.  
Her love has given the world his noblest deeds,  
She is the light that warns him from the shoal—  
The reefs—the rocks—where fell destruction leads  
And dark engulfing waters silent roll.

*Midsummer*

The red-winged black-bird whistled from the reeds  
The cat-tail stalks rose thickly straight and tall,  
By meadow-slopes rang sweet a carnival  
Of bobolinks down-fluttering on the meads;  
From ribbon-grass and downy road-side weeds  
Fine powdered particles of dust would fall,  
And where the sun shone, through an old stone  
wall  
Danced in its light a myriad of seeds.

Then came a hush in Nature—one that fell  
Like shadows on the leaves, so soft it seemed,  
Or like that pause which follows when a bell  
Peals, and is silent; and we sat and dreamed,  
While all around the waters wove their spell  
And far above the cloudless azure gleamed.

*Sisterhood*

All women born are sisters; low or high,

Good, bad, indifferent or how you name

Your silk-beruffled and most haughty dame

Whose gilded carriage rumbles slowly by,

Your drunken courtesan with hair awry,

Barred, marred and scarred by branding irons of  
shame.

Lo! in their childhood they were all the same,

And have no false distinctions when they die.

Oh! sisters, to your own sex most unkind,

How will it fare you when you waste your breath

And sink like bubbles in the sea of Death,

If to your sisters you were deaf and blind?

Remember His forgiveness, which sufficed

For Magdalen, who washed the feet of Christ!

*Water-Lilies*

We rowed the boat among them as they lay  
    Pale lilies, snowy and with hearts of gold,  
That sprang from under depths of oozy mould  
And starred the waters of a Summer day;  
And I remember after, that in play  
    You wound them round your forehead fold on fold,  
And feigned you were a Naiad, shy and cold  
Or water-sprite, or mocking woodland fay.

Yet an you were a Naiad, this I know  
    That you were courted by the amorous sun,  
    Who kissed your creamy lilies one by one  
Till they had drooped beneath his fervent glow;  
    But ere they withered in the twilight there  
    They left their gold hearts tangled in your hair.



*Love's Philosophy*

A rock stands harmless from a little rain  
But many storms will wear its strength away;  
And thus in life when men and women say  
Those bitter words which hasten strife and pain,  
And still repeat till hope of peace is vain;  
Lo! as the hour-glass sands divide the day  
So these small things have parted them for aye,  
And Love through such harsh means itself hath slain.

A venomed adder is the human tongue  
When tipped with anger, be it either sex;  
And who when stirred with controversy, recks  
How deep or keen the cruel words have stung?  
Curb then the lips and emulate the dove,  
Lest wounding one whose life is in your love.

*To the Woman*

To lead, not drive him, is the wiser plan  
    For tactfulness will tame him all the years,  
    And tenderness, not tyranny he fears,  
For men were ever but a stubborn clan;  
And long ago since first the world began  
    And stars rose dimly in the primal spheres,  
    A little wit, diplomacy, and tears.—  
What havoc have they wrought with every man!

So shall you conquer, as the gentle rain,  
    Soothing his vanity to gain your ends,  
    Moulding his wishes till they meet your own;  
Thus as a child his confidence you gain  
    For still to flattery his heart unbends,—  
    Only a child, a little larger grown.

*To the Man*

If you a woman would desire to hold  
Faithful and true, and guided by your will,  
Be sure no art, nor flattery's fine skill  
Shall e'er deceive her, nor will gifts or gold;  
By love alone her spirit is controlled,  
This is her law, her Deity, until  
The light falls pale upon her forehead still  
The red lips ashen, and the heart grown cold.

So shall you woo her if you wish to win  
Her heart and soul, to wear her like a flower  
To drain her kisses, and keep back her tears;  
Filling with love the space she lingers in;  
Making her dream of you each passing hour  
With utter longing through the iron years.

*Morning*

The kildee's cry along the sandy shore  
    The pine-tops in the distance, and a still  
        Far sense of brooding on each wooded hill;  
The fallen trunk of a huge sycamore  
Around whose roots the river's waters pour,  
    And everywhere a subtle dawning thrill  
        That grows, and spreads, and palpitates until  
The red sun peeps above the eastern door.

What joy to stand above our vantage ground  
    Beneath the shade of overhanging beech;  
To drink in every chord of sylvan sound  
    Learning the lessons that the woods can teach;  
Our hearts and souls by sympathy thus bound  
    And happy more in thought and less in speech!

*Two Loves*

If, loving you, I sometimes seem as sad  
Or dull, or tinged with hint of sober mood,  
It is because I feel my life renewed  
Having your love; and still my treasures add  
As misers do; and what of woe I've had  
No more with its gaunt shadows may intrude;  
Thus silence fills the happy interlude  
While I sit wordless, worshiping, and glad.

A boy's love and a man's love intertwined  
I give to you to govern all the time,  
Whether it run to reason or to rhyme.  
The passion and the purity combined;  
The man's love, strong to fight and work and plan,  
The boy's, to wake the lover in the man.

*On a Country Road*

A whitened length of grayish dust that leads  
    Past a rough bridge where grape-vines idly trail;  
    From distant woods the whistle of a quail  
And butterflies that flit above the weeds.  
Horizonward a bluish haze recedes  
    And flaunts a snowy cloud-shape like a sail;  
    The scent of strawberries along a swale  
Comes pungently to anyone who heeds.

How slowly and how joyous passed that day,  
    The wayside roses climbing in a throng;  
The far-brought odor of the new-mown hay  
    The cherries dangling as we rode along;  
And cheering us along the homeward way  
    The sweet-wrought flutings of the robin's song!

*Re-incarnation*

The flower you gathered, blossomed long ago  
    Warmed by past sunshine, jeweled with the rain  
    Of bygone years; the river's liquid strain  
Which now you hear, was once the purling flow  
Of a lost stream; the very winds that blow  
    Have come and gone, will come and go again;  
    And where the primal grass has decked the plain  
Year after year the later grasses grow.

And thus with every line that lovers trace;  
    However dear, or passionate the word,  
The self-same thought, in a dead bosom stirred  
    Has brought the roses to some woman's face;  
And all the worship that my rhyming brings  
Is but an echo of forgotten things.

*Analysis*

To weigh as in a finely balanced scale  
Each thought and action that the season brings,  
Is but to fret the spirit with those things  
Which after all are of the least avail.  
It is enough to know we shall not fail  
In all the sweet and high imaginings,  
The nobler thoughts which lend to Love his wings  
Though Time and Fate and even Death assail.

Analysis is common, and may seem  
Through instances, conclusive as the leaf  
Borne to the Ark by the returning dove;  
But oftentimes may prove to be a theme  
Which sends the worm of jealousy and grief  
To blight the blossom of a perfect love.



*Tact*

A woman's crowning glory is her tact,  
The art of knowing when and what to say;  
When to be grave, indifferent, or gay,  
And seem so charming in her every act  
That, as a magnet, she will men attract  
And easily compel them to her sway.  
So shall she rule, or golden hair or gray,  
The subtlest type of womanhood in fact.

For tact is more than beauty, more than wit,  
Akin to genius, and the sum of all  
Which makes the woman who is blessed with it  
A Queen by right, in hovel or in hall;  
Sweet as the honeyed lines by poet writ,  
And true as rings the wild-bird's madrigal.

*In Idleness*

To lie upon the grass and watch the herds  
    Deep standing in the river, and to see  
    The barred gold glisten on the bumble-bee  
And note the noisy gossip of the birds;  
To mark the blue horizon-rim that girds  
    That purple world beyond, Infinity—  
    Under the shade of a wild-cherry tree  
To wait and listen, hampered not by words.

This was our gladness on a long June day  
    Companioned by the lazy lapse of hours,  
While ebb'd the slow, enchanted time away  
    Where bird-songs came, like intermittent showers,  
And drowsy sweet upon us where we lay,  
    The perfume of the elderberry flowers.

*A Burden of Vain Wishes*

A burden of vain wishes: hopes that died  
Vague dreams of fame and wraiths of brave renown  
Pass in the sunlight, motes that vanish down  
Beyond me, standing on this old hill-side,  
And disappear in circling vistas wide  
Like Autumn leaves that scatter, worn and brown  
When Summer lays aside her tattered crown,  
And sombre winds and rusted fields abide.

A burden of vain wishes! Nay, not so!  
Your hand-clasp is my haven and my hope,  
Your love and faith the utmost gross and scope  
Of dreams and fact—this at the last I know,  
Here, waiting while the sunset's after-glow  
Burns like a torch in valley and on slope.

*Wisdom*

There is a culture deeper far than books  
And intellect beyond the ken of schools;  
Wise sayings sometimes on the lips of fools  
And knowledge stored in many quiet nooks.  
A woman is as cultured as she looks,  
Speaks, acts, and smiles, and merely bookish rules  
She well may scorn as being clumsy tools  
With which dull fishers file their rusty hooks.

This intellect that scholars prattle of  
Why, what does it accomplish? Every age  
Has witnessed through the perfidy of Love  
How woman shows the folly of the sage.  
Nay! then, Sir Oracle, reserve thy wit  
Some woman's eyes shall give thee need of it.

*Lost Days*

The tapestry of shadows—ghosts of dreams  
That flickered through the silence and were gone,  
Lost days that we together leaned upon  
Have faded, and the recollection seems  
As dim as sunken starlight in the streams,  
When on a Summer night reflections wan  
From cloudy heights to watery depths are drawn,  
To glimmer in the current's under-gleams.

Lost days, but cherished; mirrored in a haze  
Of threadbare seasons, Winter, Autumn, Spring,  
And Summer with her moss-begirdled ways  
And flash and flutter of a bird's soft wing;  
But who shall pierce the labyrinthian maze  
To tell us where their shades are wandering?

*Evening*

The tree-toad's call from branches dead and green,  
And from the grass a cricket's rasping cry;  
An afterglow across the Eastern sky  
Red as a far-flung fire-brand's ruddy sheen;  
The lapping of swift ripples shot between  
Old logs that rigid in the current lie,  
The shadow of our boat that passes by  
Above brown sands that dimly now are seen.

This was to float with silence and the night  
Wove through the mesh of twilight like a strand;  
To note the twisting of the bat's weird flight  
And glint of fire-flies on the shelving sand,  
To be removed from earthly essence quite  
Two shadows drifting into shadow-land.

*Youth*

Age is not always given with gray hair  
Nor youth encompassed in the fewest years;  
Since doubt and pain with their attendant tears  
Are dauntless etchers of the lines of care;  
Youth is most present in the joys we share  
As swift or slow the season disappears,—  
The verve, the gladness which puts by all fears,  
The hopes we nourish and the smiles we wear.

I think of you as always being young  
Untouched by Sorrow and unworn by Time,  
Spring's blossoms opening in your tender smile;  
Like her of whom the elder Bards have sung,  
Chanting her praise in many a noble rhyme—  
Like Cleopatra by Egyptian Nile.

*Tapestry*

In the deep twilight when my random thought  
    Weaves in the silence and surrounding shade  
    Webs of odd fancies, glittering like brocade,  
Or sombre woof of darker musings brought;  
Then have the hours with mystery still fraught  
    Full on the wall a motley texture laid,  
    Within the loom of darkness spun and made  
In divers hues together firmly wrought.

And all the warp of this weird spinning seems  
    Forever old and yet forever new;  
With rusted spots and sudden golden gleams  
    A subtle blending of the false and true;  
The dull threads hinting of my wasted dreams  
    The bright ones telling of my love for you.



*Sumach*

We climbed the slope above the valley's edge;  
    Behind, the country road, a ribbon lay  
    Of powdery dust down-winding dim and gray;  
    A bird sang sweetly from a thorny hedge  
And ripples circled in the river sedge,  
    While brown October dozed the hours away;  
    And northward and beyond the hillside clay  
The clustering sumach flamed along a ledge.

The life of ruddy Autumn filled its veins  
    Deep-glowing masses glinting in the sun,  
Redder than the wild strawberry, where it stains  
    The woodland ways mid light and shadow spun;  
A gorgeous dream, a color-draught divine,  
Spilled on the golden afternoon like wine.

*Love-Letters*

Let the light flame consume them and be done  
    While their charred fragments in the embers lie,  
    The old, sweet record of the days gone by.  
Read them and burn them, lingering, one by one;  
The swift months gather and the seasons run  
    With none to tell us of the when or why;  
    Let them as ashes vanish in the sky,  
Since this our courtship has but just begun.

Better to miss them when we parted be  
    Than through some fault or lapsing of the years,  
    To have them made a target for the sneers  
Or jest, or scorn, of Curiosity;  
    For there are those who tear such things apart  
    To feast and mumble on a human heart.

*Spring*

The sleet drives sharply on the window-panes  
And naked trees like scaffolds darkly stand;  
The iron grasp of winter on the land  
Locks fields and streams in glittering icy chains;  
The north-wind wails in keen Polaric strains  
And dead leaves dance a ghostly saraband,  
While cloud-fleets dim, by shapes fantastic manned  
Sail westward where the sunset coldly wanes.

But by the blaze of our red-glowing grate  
We see beyond the armored line of eaves,  
And mark the flashing of a flicker's wing;  
And violets in the blue flames seem to wait,  
While shining through a mist of emerald leaves,  
Beckons and laughs the sweet, fresh face of Spring.

*The Flight of Time*

The flight of Time will through the cycles wing  
And one age follow on another's path;  
The leaves of May will feel November's wrath  
And January blossom into Spring;  
And side by side we, onward wandering,  
Shall learn the lesson that each season hath,  
The bud and shard, the glow and aftermath  
The hopes that vanish and the dreams that cling.

A day is like a swallow's shadow cast  
On sleeping waters; for an instant there  
Etched by the restless pinion in mid-air,  
Vague and elusive as the fleeting past;  
So let us cleave to gladness in our day  
While Time, that miser, hoards the years away.

*Late Violets*

Fast-hidden in October's grassy swales  
Late violets lay; we found them, you and I,  
While gusty winds unbridled galloped by  
And smoky Indian-summer filled the vales;  
And when the grass divided in the gales  
They glinted there like bits of Autumn sky,  
Then disappeared, as sylvan fairies shy  
When clamor rude their close retreat assails.

Late violets; blue as deep-sea depths unstirred,  
They nestled there, and heard the pulse of earth  
Reverberate within its hollow girth  
Like to a giant echo, faint and blurred;  
And far beyond the sweep of Winter's wing  
We saw their paler sisters of the Spring.

*Autumn Reveries*

Along the slopes the fading stubbles show  
And in the woods a purple vapor swims,  
While hickory-nuts from the wind-shaken limbs  
Drop down and nestle in the leaves below;  
The sumach burns with ever-deepening glow  
And shadows lurk about the shallow rims  
Of silent pools; while eastward slowly dims  
The penciled flight of a departing crow.

And you and I here on this russet hill  
Drink deep the beaker of Autumnal wine  
Held to our lips, and feel the nameless thrill  
That ebbs and flows in changing shade and shine;  
The breeze is dead; the trees are rapt and still  
As pilgrims kneeling at a desert shrine.

*Rosemary*

Rosemary for remembrance—may this be  
    A leaf where treasured happiness is sealed  
    Unknown to others; which to us will yield  
(Our memory the magic opening key)  
A fragrant scent of the lost days set free  
    A music to our listening ears revealed;  
    As a rough shell, that sometimes holds concealed  
The mystic murmurous secret of the sea.

For something to the written line belongs  
    Beyond the word that's uttered; through the pen  
    This verse, mayhap, shall come to live again  
And take its place among remembered songs;  
When you and I, and all our love and trust  
    Are blended into long-forgotten dust.

*Dawn*

The grey dawn flooded in the lonely room  
    That mourned your absence; on the western wall  
    The sallow shafts of sunbeams struck, to fall  
As sadly as they would across a tomb;  
A shadow in the corner was a plume  
    That night had dropped from off her sable pall;  
    A thorny rose stood leafless in the hall,  
Your going thus had robbed it of its bloom.

The very pictures were aware of this  
    As silver-stoled and silent slowly came  
    The first reluctant messengers of Dawn;  
Of all you are, and all you are to miss  
    Byron seemed speaking from his oval frame,  
And Greek Aspasia whispered, "she is gone!"



*Noon*

The book I hold within my idle clasp  
Is closed, and sealed, for aught I care indeed;  
My mind has now no leisure hour to read  
No tale of love, nor old romance to grasp;  
My thoughts hang shattered, as a broken hasp  
And touch of hands not Fancy's touch I need;  
For since you left my heart begins to bleed  
Where Memory has pierced it like an asp.

To love you and to lose you for a day  
A loss irreparable to me it seems—  
The sting of Fate, the worm that never dies.  
I cannot live to have you long away  
And see, alas! as only in my dreams,  
The light of recognition in your eyes.

*Night*

What shadows troop across the fading floor  
    What hush floats ever as the shadows turn!  
Like ashes brooding in a sullen urn  
Mocking the shades of those who went before,  
My thoughts lie heavy, and I dream no more  
    But ever for your absent face I yearn;  
    And grudgingly my sombre lesson learn  
Of waiting for your footstep at the door.

Mayhap my wish is selfish; just to see  
    Your hand in mine; to know that you are here  
    Close, with the lyrics of your tears or smiles;  
I cannot say what this will mean to me  
    Nor all the ways in which I hold you dear,  
    Across this void of unrelenting miles.

*Anniversary*

This is that day of days when, long ago,  
    We stood together by an ancient man  
    And heard him drone about the Scriptural plan  
Which plighted men and women here below;  
And westward burned the Autumn afterglow  
    While scarlet vines across the branches ran,  
    And flying leaves, a russet caravan  
Fled down the vales in rustling overflow.

I scarcely recollect the spoken words,  
    Nor care I for the ceremony vain  
Which said, forsooth, that God had made us one,  
    Since Love had mated us as mate the birds—  
And on the windows was the West's bright stain  
    The parting benediction of the sun.

*Happiness*

Not to be happy in our own conceit  
Of faith, and truth, and well-remembered days  
In breezy woods and empty, pastoral ways,  
Where the brown waves of leaves Autumnal beat;  
But more to wish that other souls may meet  
And find their comrades in this earthly maze;  
That men and women, like to us, will gaze,  
Each in each other's eyes and find life sweet.

When you and I together silent wait  
Not only do these thoughts of Thee and Me,  
Knock at our hearts, as at an inner gate,  
But through the wonder and the mystery,  
Deep in our dreams we pray a kindly fate;  
For lovers past, and lovers yet to be.

*In Days to Come*

In days to come, when we are old and gray  
    Bent with the years and disciplined by Time,  
    Trembling and feeble we will scan this rhyme  
Whose light for us has almost dimmed away,  
And haply then remember, if we may,  
    Some sweet suggestion of our youth sublime,  
    Some keen reminder which like bruised thyme  
Shall bring the memory of our Summer day.

There is no life but loving; naught but Youth  
    To make love perfect; when the rose-leaves fall  
The perfume withers, while the birds are dumb.  
    And thus indeed I could in very truth  
Pray that we both might early yield this thrall,  
    And so lose Winter in the days to come.

*Hero-Worship*

To every man some doting woman lends  
    A halo of enchantment; in her eyes  
    He is most noble, loving, brave and wise;  
This worship like to incense pure ascends  
And with her dreams in painted glamour blends  
    Like rainbow melting in the western skies;  
    His lightest word is something dear to prize  
His chance caress for sorrow full amends.

Oh, mystery! that woman cannot see  
    Her own superiority to man,  
Which soars on high like eagle's wing above—  
Just as it was, has been, will ever be,  
    Because ordained by God's primeval plan,  
    Her greater faith, fidelity and love.

*Waiting*

To picture you when far apart from me,  
    To guess how you might occupy the day;  
    Whether the moments slowly glide away  
    And if the hours or swift or tedious be;  
And never from this patient vigil free,  
    But like a statue in the sculptor's clay  
    Musing and brooding, or as Moslems pray,  
Stretching my hands through silence out to thee.

There is so little time, Love, after all,  
    To walk together; such a little while  
Before our lives will melt as in a breath;  
How soon, alas, the leaves of April fall!  
How much I miss the joyance of your smile,  
    And waiting seems the bitterness of death.

*Dreams*

Not always have we prudent sowed the seed  
    Of thoughts prosaic, as to wisely reap,  
    The less impassioned memories that keep  
Our lives more commonplace in word and deed;  
For Fancy sometimes blows upon her reed  
    And Romance dimly rises, half-asleep,  
    While over heart and brain and spirit sweep  
Faint chords, like wings from mystic cages freed.

Either a song of gladness or of tears  
    In sunshine rippling or on shadow cast,  
Thus to our ears this mocking music seems;  
    Something to listen for through flying years  
Rapt echoes of the future or the past,  
    The respite and the recompense of dreams.



*Affinity*

The sparks fly always upward, and my soul  
    Spreads wings to meet yours, as its one true mate,  
    Whether the paths be blossom-crowned or strait  
Whether in gladness or in bitter dole;  
No voice but yours can soothe me, or control,  
    No words save yours my ways illuminate;  
    I am content to follow, lead or wait,  
My eyes fixed ever on the distant goal.

Not oak and vine are we, but lovers twain  
    Who face the world together side by side,  
    And so shall bide until our latest breath;  
In storm or shine, in burning sun or rain  
    Through life's long ways in comradeship allied,  
    Not to be parted by the hands of death.

*Laughter*

The touch of mirth still cherish, as is best,  
    Laughter, with lips slow-spreading to a smile;  
    What were this world without the quip and wile  
The cap and bells, the old time-honored jest?  
Welcome the coming, speed the departing guest;  
    And still with merriment the way beguile.  
    A little joy shall last the longest while,  
Be gay, look up, be merry with the rest.

For mark the limpid quibbles of the streams,  
    The joyousness that sunshine scatters far,  
    The crooning exultation of the sea!  
Better be glad with careless John-a-Dreams  
    Than linger where the sober sages are  
    And lose the wiser sense of jollity.

*Sanctuary*

As from the toil and turmoil of the world  
I come to bring good fortune or defeat,  
And once again your loving eyes to meet,  
Then droops the rest, like a lone banner furled  
By idle winds; for all my thoughts are whirled  
Toward you, like a cloud of swallows fleet;  
And all the cares that follow at my feet  
Like wraiths against the darkness back are hurled.

Home is where love is, and no doubt can pierce  
That inner space where you and I do dwell,  
Nor cast a lurking shadow on its floor;  
However beats the tide beyond us fierce  
However prowls, with ululating yell,  
The ever-watchful wolf beside the door.

*In the Beech Woods*

Broad screens, which shut the dawnlight from the earth  
Of emerald leaves dense woven thick across;  
And under foot were strips of velvet moss  
That sloped around the beech-tree's mighty girth.  
No bird-song breaking into sudden mirth  
But silence, and a sadness for such loss,  
With here and there a shred of sunlight's gloss  
To lighten up the forest's flowerless dearth.

So must the Eden garden once have stood  
When Adam and his bride went on their way:  
No birds nor flowers in the pleasant wood  
But sombre aisles, and solemn spaces gray.  
Do you remember how we found it there?  
A green cathedral, ghostly-still and bare!

*Contentment*

To glean the fields of life and take the grain  
    With thorns or poppies as the gods decree;  
To lightly jest at Winter's wrath and see  
    Flowers in frost upon the window-pane;  
    To build our airy castle-walls in Spain,  
However bare the near surroundings be—  
This is the secret of content; the key  
    Which men have given all the world to gain.

We find it where the sun and shadows meet  
    In sylvan spaces cloistered from the town,  
    Where vague, yet clear, its presence may be seen;  
It rustles in the dead leaves at our feet  
    It catches at the ruffle of your gown,  
    And beckons on with happy eyes serene.

*Sorrow*

The saving grace of sorrow has been ours  
    So that this present happiness is sweet;  
    Yea! doubly so, since long ago our feet  
Were pierced by thorns, and seldom touched by flowers;  
Past sadness with a rarer joy endowers  
    These days in which our pulses higher beat;  
    Like blossoms which uplift, the sun to greet  
After the stress of sudden chilling showers.

Fire tempers steel; and thus the test of pain  
    Shall make souls steadfast, and the true heart strong  
    And bring tranquility from stormy years;  
Life's bitter lessons are not learned in vain  
    And rightly runs the burden of the song,  
    "They lightest laugh who knew the touch of tears."

*In Winter Paths*

The tumbled drifts like fixed and frozen seas  
Are billowed up around us, all in white,  
The swirling winds on leafless branches smite  
And round about the trunks of naked trees  
Flit restlessly the black-capped chickadees;  
Shy bits of grey, in brief and silent flight;  
The woods are blacker than at dead of night  
And under icy shields the waters freeze.

But yonder was a spray where on a time  
The robin sang; in that lone reach remote  
Wild violets gathered, bluer than the sea;  
Nor shall this dearth banish the water's rhyme  
The green of the grass, the blue-bird's April note,  
While side by side you wander here with me.

*Steadfastness*

We will not dread the future nor the past.  
    There is enough to live for day by day,  
    Time and to spare for either work or play  
And the long slumber coming at the last;  
God and Eternity are much too vast  
    To fret us while we linger by the way.  
    Sometimes we shall be sad, and sometimes gay,  
But heart with heart, and hand in hand stand fast.

Let others seek the solace of the shrine  
    Under the gilded and inscripted dome  
    That shuts from sight the far blue heavens above;  
For us the essence of the true divine,  
    The human joys that touch and sweeten home—  
    And that denied the angels—which is Love.



*Pictures*

There have been pictures that were reckoned fair  
    In ancient times by cunning painters wrought,  
    And far across the tides of ocean brought  
To hang at last like jewels old and rare  
In stately halls; but none that would compare  
    To some one woman, by the Graces taught,  
    With roses at her bosom, perfume-fraught  
And motes of golden sunlight in her hair.

Time picks the crumbling canvas into shreds  
    Till, dust at length it sinks in the abyss,  
    And with the winds in errant circle blows;  
But ere Fate comes to snip the tightened threads  
    There is no picture which is like to this—  
    The one fair woman—at her breast a rose.

*Shadows*

If we are naught but shadows, as they say,  
    Seen briefly as a sunset while we pass,  
    If life is tinkling cymbals—sounding brass—  
And love a dream that quickly fades away—  
Fate may not rob us; we have had our day;  
    Have heard the music and have drained our glass;  
    And if we are to perish as the grass  
Death cannot quench the spark which lit our clay.

For Love beyond all else is vestal flame  
    That burns forever, constant as is Time  
    Steadfast and bright as is the Northern star;  
And when, like mist, we vanish as we came,  
    Mayhap our passion shall imbue this rhyme  
    With life for others, shadows though we are.

*Notes.*



## *Notes*

The twentieth sonnet of the sequence as it appeared in the first edition is an emendation by the author. As the sonnets appeared serially in the *St. Louis Mirror*, the twentieth was as follows:

### *At the Window*

A measure of slow musing, and a dream  
    Of other days that to her heart has sped;  
    A yard below where grasses thickly spread  
Lie out like velvet in the sunlight's gleam;  
Blue-dappled skies with clouds as wan as cream,  
    And in the streets, a wandering, noisy thread  
    Of wheels and voices, down and outward led,  
That ripples past the window in a stream.

But now a footstep echoes up the street  
    And drops the thimble from her finger there,  
The quickened pulses of the day swift beat  
    And sunshine nestles in her tawny hair;  
He looks above, as hoping not in vain—  
Her face appears, a flower at the pane.

In the first, 1901, edition the thirty-fifth sonnet was as follows:

*Selfishness*

I want no child to take one jot from me  
Of this, your love; no helpless clinging hands  
To hold their place as strong as iron bands.  
I'd lock your heart and throw away the key.  
As now you are, so I would have you be  
Till from Life's glass should fall the latest sands;  
Till on the hearth the ultimate dull brands  
Fade out, and leave us to Eternity.

I know the children's power; and I know  
Your soul would flower and blossom to a child;  
And loving you, I would not have it so  
Lest I of my sole treasure were beguiled;  
To learn that bitter lesson, late in life,  
How far a mother loves beyond a wife.

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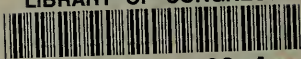
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